



# CRISP Newsletter

Center for Research on Inclusion & Social Policy



DECEMBER 2020

## Racial justice and COVID-19

For CRISP, 2020 has been a year of emotion, growth, opportunity, and fear highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened discussions related to racial justice. Our team has risen to the challenge and navigated these issues by adapting our internal interactions and planning. For example, while COVID-19 has presented many challenges for our research, we have transitioned our

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work virtually to ensure continuity within our research activities. Like everyone, we have maximized and adopted new technologies to continue providing our student researchers with professional development opportunities, as well as celebrating their successes and transitions.

We also have adapted how we engage our partners and residents. We prioritized shifting in-person interviews and focus groups to virtual meetings to protect community members, our researchers, and our students. We added more opportunities for communication to strategize on projects and check in on progress. Our team also found ways to provide incentives to our participants to continue ethical community-engagement practices.

This year brought racial justice issues to the forefront of national and local conversations, presenting CRISP with more opportunities to pursue projects in ways we hadn't been able to before. It has increased the visibility of our work and the important issues we research. National conversations spurred local organizations—groups that are not traditionally focused on racial justice—into action to create more equitable outcomes. Likewise, seeing and hearing more about these issues increased the public's awareness and ability to push organizations to address equity issues in the workplace, the government, and the community.

However, the convergence of racial justice and COVID-19 has also raised some important considerations for our future work. Latinx and indigenous communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, while Black residents have navigated both the pandemic and ongoing police violence. These traumatic experiences will affect any research activities within those communities that require people to discuss experiences related to that trauma. Our team will need to evaluate and modify how we engage participants to be culturally sensitive to their needs and collective experiences.

Despite some of these challenges, our team is well positioned to engage with these issues and communities. Our community-based research has always centered around people who are most impacted by the services and programs we evaluate. As we elevate these voices, our team will continue to consider the implications of our research in the coming year.



# LETTER *from* the DIRECTOR

Our team has worked hard to build and maintain our brand of research since the inception of CRISP. At the time we founded CRISP, very few organizations in Central Indiana openly and consistently discussed issues of race and racism. It was not a popular topic and didn't necessarily lead to funding opportunities. However, as someone who is trained in assessing racial and social inequity—and accompanied by a team hungry to put their own skills to work to make a difference—we collectively pursued our passion of achieving equity in Marion

County and Indiana. Now, we are honored to engage with local partners, news outlets, and others interested in the intersection of equity, policy, and organizational change.

Our hard work in this space prepared us for the challenges of 2020. As discussions of racial justice surged throughout the nation, our team was already working diligently to promote and support racial and social equity. During and after summer 2020, numerous partners sought out CRISP's services to explore racial and social equity more meaningfully in their work. We partnered with the IUPUI Honors College to provide allyship trainings for students, received a Racial Justice Research Fund grant from IU's Office of the Vice President for Research to explore racially equitable policy design, and have participated in numerous forums, conferences, and webinars to discuss racial equity across various policy areas.

Next year will present its own sets of challenges and opportunities for CRISP. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified pervasive, long-standing systemic issues in health care, government, housing, and the justice system, which greatly contribute to inequitable outcomes for communities of color. It will be critical for researchers in these disciplines to continue to collaborate and inform their understanding of how race and racism contribute to inequities, well after racial justice is no longer at the forefront of mainstream discussions. CRISP will continue to lead in these spaces and prioritize inclusion of equity in social policy, our projects, and our partnerships.

This will also be my last letter as CRISP's director, as I move into a new role as the inaugural Chief Health Equity Officer with Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration. This position will focus on designing anti-racist and socially equitable policy for Indiana's human services, as well as overseeing efforts to address social determinants of Hoosier health, such as housing, criminal justice, and many others. This decision was incredibly difficult as CRISP is truly moving in a positive direction with considerable momentum. My work with CRISP has prepared me substantially for this next phase of my career in which I will work first-hand with the community that CRISP often seeks to serve. I am incredibly proud of CRISP, our students, and our team's growth. It has been a blessing and a privilege to develop the framework for CRISP with our team. I am confident that CRISP will continue its trajectory and will continue to seek out opportunities to expand upon its work and partnerships.

*Breanca Merritt*

**Breanca Merritt, Ph.D.**, Founding Director

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## MISSION STATEMENT

*We analyze and disseminate community-relevant research about social disparities and complex policy issues.*

# FOLLOW OUR WORK

## **FEBRUARY 2020: Black homeownership trends in Marion County**

Trends in Marion County show there are racial gaps in homeownership rates and home values. Black homeowners have a lower homeownership rate, and houses in majority-Black neighborhoods are undervalued compared to homes in other parts of Marion County. Read the full report on Black homeownership trends in Marion County [at this link](#) and watch Breanca Merritt discuss the issue on [WRTV in Indianapolis](#).

## **APRIL 2020: Black death rates from COVID-19 in Marion County**

As of April 13, 2020, Black Hoosiers comprised about 10 percent of Indiana's population but accounted for 20 percent of its COVID-19 deaths. CRISP examined multiple sources to highlight potential origins of racial disparities that influence differences in COVID-19 outcomes. Merritt discussed the issue with [WISH-TV's multicultural reporter](#) when COVID first arrived in Indiana and then spoke out again on [WFYI](#) and [Side Effects Public Media](#) as testing sites began appearing across Indianapolis. Read the full report on Black COVID-19 deaths in Marion County [at this link](#).

## **JULY 2020: Immigration policy and COVID-19**

Indiana's immigrant community may be at greater risk during the COVID-19 pandemic due to fears over how using services could affect their immigration status. Immigrants also tend to be front-line workers in essential businesses, which places them at greater risk of COVID-19 exposure. Fear of seeking treatment coupled with an inability to social distance at their jobs could lead to higher infection rates within Marion County's immigrant community. This information made headlines in Indiana as Roxy Lawrence discussed the issue with [The Statehouse File](#) and the [Indianapolis Business Journal](#). Read the full report on immigration policy and COVID-19 [at this link](#).

## **AUGUST 2020: Substance abuse, mental health, and crime on Indianapolis' Near Eastside**

CRISP partnered with the John Boner Neighborhood Centers to identify core drivers of crime in a study area on the Near Eastside of Indianapolis. The study area has higher incidents of overall, property, and violent crime compared to the rest of the city. This brief explores the association between drug use, mental health disorders, and crime in this area. CRISP's [Kelsie Stringham-Marquis spoke with WFYI](#) about the issue following the brief's release. Read the full report on co-occurring disorders and crime on the Indianapolis Near Eastside [at this link](#).

## **AUGUST 2020: Marion County annual homeless count**

In partnership with Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention and other local organizations, CRISP helped to coordinate and conduct the annual point-in-time count in Marion County. The report documents the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2020. The report also highlights key findings and takeaways in order to inform policymaking and service provision for individuals experiencing homelessness. The report received quite a bit of news coverage in Central Indiana, including stories in the [Indianapolis Business Journal](#), the [Indianapolis Recorder](#), and [The Indianapolis Star](#). Read the full report [at this link](#).



# HIGHLIGHTS

## DATA DAY 2020

January 22, 2020

🐦 Breanca Merritt, Ph.D.

Busy day for CRISP!  
Hosted a table for  
@IndianaMPH Data Day  
this afternoon.  
@IUPublicPolicy



CRISP participated in MPH Data Day 2020 at the beginning of the year. This annual data-driven showcase is hosted by the Indiana Management Performance Hub (MPH). A team from CRISP presented an interactive map with data relating to substance abuse, mental health, and crime on Indianapolis' Near Eastside.

## FORTY UNDER 40

February 7, 2020

🐦 Siân Mooney, Ph.D.,  
Dean, O'Neill School

Our wonderful @ONEill\_Indy  
faculty member @breancamerritt  
is being honored by the @IBJnews  
Forty under 40 #ibj40. Celebrating  
her achievements as a leader.



The Indianapolis Business Journal recognized Breanca Merritt as a rising star in the community earlier this year. Breanca was named one of IBJ's annual Forty Under 40 professionals in recognition of her leadership in CRISP's work.

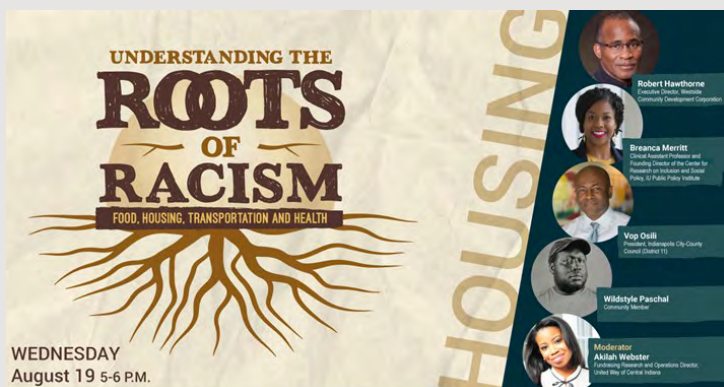


🐦 Nasser Paydar, IUPUI Chancellor

Enjoy seeing so many faculty,  
alumni & friends of @IUPUI &  
across @IndianaUniv recognized  
in 2020 @IBJnews 40 Under 40.  
Exciting to see how many of you are  
making a positive difference in your  
fields & in our great city. #IBJ40

## ROOTS OF RACISM

August 19, 2020



Breanca Merritt served as a panelist in the Roots of Racism symposium hosted by one of our partners, United Way of Central Indiana. Panelists discussed the history of displacement, exclusion, relocation, and segregation of Black families in Central Indiana. The discussion further analyzed how these actions limited and undermined Black residents' ability to build wealth, retain their own homes, and access safe, affordable housing.

## EVICTED IN INDIANA PART ONE: INDIANA'S RENTAL HOUSING EVICTION LANDSCAPE



October 26, 2020

Both Breanca Merritt and Kelsie Stringham-Marquis served as panelists for part one of the Evicted in Indiana series hosted by Prosperity Indiana. The webinar provided Hoosiers the opportunity to hear from local experts about the landscape of evictions and housing insecurity. Breanca and Kelsie provided data and context for the eviction trends seen in Indianapolis.

## O'NEILL DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION SUMMIT



November 7, 2020

CRISP participated in the inaugural O'Neill School Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Summit which sought to highlight the work O'Neill School students, faculty, staff, and alumni were doing to address the challenges of systemic racism. Kelsie Stringham-Marquis and research assistant, Jacob Purcell, presented their findings on disparities in homelessness in Indianapolis. They discussed trends in racial disparities and explored potential causes and implications for homeless service providers in Indianapolis. In addition, Kelsie presented about white supremacy culture in nonprofit organizations and potential solutions to address and minimize those effects.



## INDIANA EVALUATION ASSOCIATION

2019–2020



Roxy Lawrence joined the Indiana Evaluation Association (IEA) in late 2019 and became part of the board as the At-Large Chair of Communication in October 2020. In this role, Roxy has helped IEA with their communication needs and supported efforts to increase membership. Roxy has gone on to join the program committee, which seeks to help evaluators build and hone professional skills, as well as the policy subcommittee, which aims to help advance policy evaluation in Indiana.



## SPRING 2021: CRISP EVALUATION CLINIC

Last spring, we piloted the CRISP Evaluation Clinic to provide no-cost research evaluation services to local nonprofit organizations working to address issues of equity and/or social policy in their communities. Two teams of students worked with Harrison Center for the Arts and the Indianapolis Housing Agency to address issues of gentrification and housing disparities. These projects offered students evaluation training while providing them the opportunity to conduct community-engaged research. Students reported generally enjoying their experiences while also pointing out opportunities for improvement. Using their feedback, our team acquired a grant through the Indiana Campus Compact to evaluate the clinic implementation and administration to improve student and partner experiences.

We are excited to announce that we will formally launch the full iteration of the CRISP Evaluation Clinic in spring 2021. Much like last year, two groups of students will work with local organizations to help them better serve their communities. We hope to build upon last year's successes and continue to learn how to adapt the clinic to improve the experiences for future partners and students.

WE'RE  
EXCITED  
ABOUT

# MEET *the* TEAM

CRISP leadership is excited to highlight students who have graduated in the past year: Brendan Bow, Weston Jones, and Nkuli Greenwood. We are proud of these talented individuals and their dedication to continuing their work in equity and inclusion. Congratulations!



## ***Brendan Bow***

**M.S. Human-Computer Interaction, May 2020**

School of Informatics and Computing

My experience at CRISP has been the most gainful and meaningful employment in my college career. I have always been passionate about social issues, and I enjoy using previously learned skills on human-centered research and data analysis to help support social causes. CRISP has helped to hone my expertise in these fields by allowing me to learn how to work with publicly available datasets and perform analyses to form arguments. This experience prepared me to pursue similar interests in the future by providing hands-on work experience and opportunities to flesh out my research interests. I have found that one of the most fulfilling parts of working at CRISP is our ability to address inequality through data.

After graduation, I am exploring whether to complete a Ph.D. or go into the job field. I am interested in the intersection of information, technology, and problem solving. I hope to apply my technical, design, and problem-solving skills to address issues across a broad variety of disciplines—some of which may not even be related to computing or design.





## ***Weston Jones***

**B.A. Political Science, May 2020**

School of Liberal Arts

I began working with CRISP during the summer of 2019. What initially drew me to the work done at CRISP was the persistent emphasis on conducting social science research from an intersectional lens, incorporating communities that are frequently ignored in research. Working at CRISP has allowed me to foster several skillsets, including conducting interviews, cleaning transcripts, coding qualitative data, as well

as understanding how to utilize platforms for research purposes. Above all, I had the tremendous privilege of getting to know an incredible body of diverse researchers who share my passion for social justice and equity, exemplifying these values each day in the workplace.

After graduation, I will attend Berkeley Law School, where I intend to concentrate my legal education in the areas of social justice and the law, as well as international studies. Specifically, I want to use my J.D. to help cement and protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people—particularly transgender people—into law and everyday practice across the globe. Moreover, I hope to gain experience working for international bodies through Berkeley's international field placements, such as at the United Nations Human Rights Program.



## ***Nkuli Greenwood***

**M.P.A. Policy Analysis, December 2019**

O'Neill School Public and Environmental Affairs

When I think of CRISP, I am reminded of effective leadership that cultivates the spirit of “ubuntu”—the African philosophy that values the virtues of compassion and humanity. The leadership at CRISP fostered an environment in which diversity and inclusion are respected. CRISP was the perfect place to narrow down my interests, apply my classroom knowledge, and participate in relevant projects that directly translate to real-

world experience. With the professional support and guidance from CRISP leadership, I spent the semester researching and analyzing immigration trends in Indiana. One of my highlights was attending the Civic and Community Engaged workshop at the Indianapolis Urban League during which I learned about the integration of community engagement into academic programs.

My experience at CRISP inspired me to pursue a career in program evaluation. I decided to get involved with organizations that are in line with my fields of interest. I am currently a policy intern with Common Cause Indiana and volunteer on different committees with Indiana Evaluation Association. I am searching for opportunities that allow me to use evidence-based practices to address community problems.

# *How to* **SUPPORT CRISP**

You can help CRISP continue its research, change lives of students, and impact our community by making a contribution to our general support fund. Your generosity will further establish the center as a leader in inclusion and social policy research.

## **Support the Center for Research on Inclusion & Social Policy Fund** **Online Giving**

Online giving is the simple, secure way to invest in the CRISP's future.



## **Mail Your Gift**

To make a gift by check, money order, or credit card, print and complete the **mail-in gift form**.

If you would like information on how to give in other ways, please contact O'Neill IUPUI Director of Development Michelle Soucy at **[msoucy@iupui.edu](mailto:msoucy@iupui.edu)** or 317-278-2461.



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